

Get to know Katharine Budd, cofounder of payroll solution NOW Money

As part of our quick fire questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Katharine Budd, cofounder of NOW Money, an end-to-end digital payroll solution for lower earners.

What was the catalyst for launching NOW Money?

In 2016, digital products for customers in the Middle East were still scarce – let alone financial services for low income people. We noticed the level of acquisitions into retail banks was relatively low, despite a population of over 10M in the UAE and 30M in Saudi Arabia.

At this time, banks hadn't moved much beyond physical branch networks to service customers – a model that made it prohibitively expensive to give accounts to lower-earners. The idea for NOW Money was born!

Tell me about the business?

If you don't earn enough to have an account to manage your finances from, that's a problem for you. It's also a problem for your employer, who needs a way to pay your salary. Most don't want the headache of managing a cash payroll and regulation largely prohibits it anyway.

NOW Money provides payroll to companies employing workers who fall below the 'traditional account' threshold (about \$1,000 a month) and provides an account to each of their workers to get paid safely into, transact in stores or online with a Visa card, send money overseas and more.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

We knew customers and companies wanted our products, but we only realised banks were another opportunity a couple of years ago. Many provide a "payroll card" (without much functionality beyond ATM) to their corporate clients employees as a loss-making product. We now provide the NOW Money application and account to banks for use with these customers as well.

What has been your biggest challenge so far?

Working with suppliers in the payment space who don't interface with the customer. When anything goes wrong, it's your customers who get hit hard, your reputation, not theirs. They rarely act with the kind of urgency required to keep customers satisfied. We build as much of our own infrastructure as possible, in house, as we know we can trust ourselves better than external providers.

How does NOW Money answer an unmet need?

Despite fintech having moved from zero to "boom" on the region, there's still very little focusing on banking the people at the bottom. Most new entrants are ancillary banking products for people who have an existing account.

What one piece of advice would you give to other founders or future founders?

Trust your gut! Not a new one, but if people seem strange, avoid getting into business with them. Your instinct proves right more often than not.

Katharine Budd, is cofounder of NOW Money.

